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"Seine Interpunktion ist nicht 'dudisch', sondern *rhetorisch*"[1]: Interpretations of Interpunktionsreihungen in *Zettel's Traum*

> The original document...showed no signs of punctuation of any sort. Yet on holding the verso against a lit rush this new book of Morses responded most remarkably to the silent query of our world's oldest light and its recto let out the piquant fact that it was but pierced butnot punctured...by numerous stabs and foliated gashes made by a pronged instrument. These paper wounds, four in type, were gradually and correctly understood to mean stop, please stop, do please stop, and O do please stop respectively, and following up their one true clue, the circumflexuous wall of a singleminded men's asylum, accentuated by bi tso fb rok engl a ssan dspl itch ina, — Yard inquiries pointed out → that they ad bîn "provoked" ay ^ fork, of à grave Brofèsor; àth é's Brèak — fast — table; ; acùtely profèŠšionally *piquéd*, to=introdùce a notion of time [ùpon à plane (?) sù ' ' fàç'e'] by pùnct! ingh oles (sic) in iSpace?!
>
> JAMES JOYCE: *Finnegan's Wake*, 123–124

Our summer reading group started in 2018 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was advertised by the art historian James Elkins under the title "Impossibly long and complex novels with weird typography: Arno Schmidt." In 2018 and 2019 we met during the summer in a classroom in Chicago. When COVID-19 arrived the reading group went online. Jim advertised it widely, posting to thousands of social media followers and emailing literature departments all over the world. In June 2021 we began to read Arno Schmidt's *Zettel's Traum (ZT)*, which has occupied our Saturday meetings for over four years. The roster of participants changes over time — academics, artists, philosophers, translators, among others — from places spanning the globe: Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Germany, Turkey, India, and Japan. We have hosted the translator John Woods, typographer Friedrich Forssman, and scholars Dieter Stündel and Susanne Fischer. Last year, four members of our group co-authored a paper on Schmidt's

[1] Arno Schmidt: *Zettel's Traum*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 1970, S. 174. Dän Pagenstecher says about Edgar Allan Poe: "His punctuation is not ›Webst'ric‹, but rather *rhetorical*; and *subjectively logical & (in)consistent.*" Hereafter, inline citations to *Zettel's Traum* will give both typoscript and typeset pagination parenthetically, e.g.: (174/175).

Panorama Theory for the *Panoramic and Immersive Media Studies Yearbook*.[2] Many thanks to Ulrich Klappstein for the opportunity to contribute this analysis of punctuation in *ZT*.

Background, existing scholarship

There is widespread acknowledgment of the importance of typographic experimentation in Schmidt's work beginning with the *Berechnungen* (1955) and *Das steinerne Herz* (1956), but in most accounts the typography conforms to simple schemata of the sort he sets out in *Berechnungen III* (c. 1955, published 1980). Dieter Stündel devotes some pages to Schmidt's typographical inventions, noting they often substitute for longer, more cumbersome descriptions, and that they can also represent actions and "Bewegungsrhythmen."[3] For Volker Max Langbehn, the parentheses, semicolons, and other typographic elements mainly denote "sound images" that capture "the immediacy of acoustic data."[4] Other scholars see the typography as principally optical and sensorial.[5] Forssman, the typographer, identifies Schmidt's Interpunktionsreihungen as one typographic experiment among several, which picture [darstellen] narrative elements [Handlungselemente] such as "Pausen, Fragen, Betonungen, Gesten, Rhythmen, Illustrationen, und Spannungssituationen."[6] A number of studies on *ZT* simply omit the typography, on the implicit assumption that it is either self-evident or illegible.[7]

In these evaluations there is general agreement that Schmidt's typography is part of his larger realist project, in which mimetic precision can take many forms and may even need to move outside of conventional language. Doris Plöschberger has studied the ways that Schmidt's typography is part of his overall interest in presenting the world, whether by language or by image. She recalls Schmidt's analogy to tapestry, that *ZT* is a "Gobelin wenn Sie so wollen," and remarks that *ZT* "als *Anschauungsobjekt* zu begreifen ist."[8] In this sense the typographical

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[2] Julie Boldt/James Elkins/Arthur Kolat/Daniel Weiskopf: *Panoramas as Projections of the Unconscious in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. In: Molly Briggs, Torston Logge, & Nicholas Lowe (Hgg.): *Panoramic and Immersive Media Studies Yearbook.* Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2024, S. 105–120. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111335575-006

[3] Dieter Stündel: *Arno Schmidt Zettel's Traum*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 1982, S. 42–43.

[4] Volker Max Langbehn: *Arno Schmidt's Zettel's Traum: An Analysis*. Rochester: Camden House 2003, S. 78. Langbehn notes the "paradox" that just as writing was emerging as a medium among others, as Friedrich Kittler has argued, Schmidt tied himself to the typewriter. "As Kittler convincingly demonstrates, it is precisely this use of...technological media that disables Schmidt's desire to apprehend the materiality of sound itself."

[5] Siegbert Prawer: *'Bless Thee, Bottom! Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated'. Typographic Parallelism, Word-Play and Literary Allusion in Arno Schmidt's Zettel's Traum*. In: W. D. Robson-Scott (Hg.): *Essays in German and Dutch Literature*. London: Institute of Germanic Studies 1973, S. 167. Prawer mentions "complex impression[s] of light and landscape" and "movement of air and temperature."

[6] Friedrich Forssman: *Arno Schmidt Zettel's Traum: Neun Seiten aus der gesetzten Fassung mit Kommentaren und zwei Reproduktionen aus dem Typoskript*. Darmstadt: Suhrkamp 2010, S. 10. In this Beispielheft Forssman also identifies the following types of experiments: Parallele Handlungen, Schreibweisen, Gleichheitszeichen, Kolumnenwechsel, Untrennbares, Etyms, Ramifikitionen, Interpunktionsreihungen, Sonderzeichen, Abbildung, Grafiken, und Satzzeichen.

[7] See, for example: Axel Dunker/Sabine Kyora (Hg.): *Arno Schmidt Handbuch*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2022. This recent handbook does not include an essay on punctuation.

[8] Doris Plöschberger: *"...hundert Details...und...doch kein Bild von dem Gesamten...": Zum Verhältnis von Schrift und Bild in Arno Schmidts* Zettel's Traum. In: Jörg Drews und Doris Plöschberger (Hg.): *Starker Toback, voller Glockenklang: Zehn Studien zum Werk Arno Schmidts*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis 2001, S. 145. Emphasis in the original.

inventions can be seen as sometimes optical, and other times rhythmic, auditory, gestural, or affective—but always in the name of a more exact realism.[9]

Many of these accounts share the idea that there is a lack of system in Schmidt's experiments. John Woods has said that "despite [Schmidt's] avowals of meticulously orchestrated punctuation, I must admit I find no real consistency."[10] On the other end of the spectrum, Friedrich Forssman claims that Schmidt's use of punctuation in the book is highly repetitive and systematic, never random.[11]

Our claims

Here we will propose that the typography does not constitute a full language, but that it contains elements of the systems of language. It has "systematicity": repeated structures and strategies that make it rewarding to stop, as we have been doing, and try to "read" (or at least "see") each example of wordless typography. Punctuation particularly rewards close reading because it often reveals a complex variety of referents, referred to in a complex variety of ways. This practice does not fit the traditional definition of mimetic realism in which the author strives to describe the world as closely as possible. One aspect of Schmidt's mimesis involves utilizing punctuation to iconically depict elements of the story, deploying abstract signs to mimic visuality. However, visual mimicry is only one way in which the punctuation strings operate. Schmidt's experiments demonstrate the fragmentary, non-linear nature of human experience through a set of complex and overlapping modalities. Ultimately, there is enough system to make Schmidt's typography the object of special interest yet not enough for it to become consistently legible.

Working classification

The system we use focuses on the punctuation strings [Satzzeichenkette oder Interpunktionsreihungen] in *ZT*. These are series of mostly normative punctuation marks and diacritics deployed inventively to narrate elements of the story. The strings are often combined with other typographic experiments, such as graphic reproductions in the margins or drawings made by typewriter manipulation. While some of Schmidt's experiments, like marginal citations, lead away from the narrative, the punctuation strings often play an essentially narrative role. Like the surrounding dialogue, they are highly allusive fragments that are sometimes entirely clear and other times on the tantalizing cusp of legibility.

From its theories to its orthography, from its layout to its punctuation, *ZT* utilizes elaborate and idiosyncratic methods designed by one person who was free to obey or break the rules he invented. Nevertheless, we might think of punctuation in three rough divisions:

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[9] Dieter Stündel: *Arno Schmidt's Zettel's Traum*, wie Anm 3, hier S. 43, 90; Doris Plöschberger: *"...hundert Details...",* wie Anm 8., hier S. 142.

[10] John Woods: *Translator's Introduction.* In: *Arno Schmidt, Collected Novellas, Collected Early Fiction 1949-1964, volume 1*. Normal: Dalkey Archive 1994, S. xiv. Woods has also said that many of Schmidt's typographic passages represent spoken words that "he didn't want to write out." (Personal communication with James Elkins, Berlin, 2015.)

[11] Friedrich Forssman: Conversation with the Arno Schmidt Reading Group. May 24, 2025.

1) Satzzeichen (in English, as we use it in our group, “marks”) such as periods, commas, colons, semi-colons, question marks, exclamation marks, etc.;

2) Kombinierte Satzzeichen (in English, in our group, “units”): small groups of Satzzeichen; and

3) Satzzeichenkette (in our terminology, “strings”): longer chains of marks and/or units.

As readers who encounter a distribution of marks, units, and strings in a given passage of *ZT*, we can ask ourselves two initial questions: (1) What sort of thing is being represented? (2) How is it being represented?

Examples

This is a complex field, which we are only now opening for ourselves, so instead of a systematic introduction, we present a collection of examples. Each one leads to new questions.

1. Scenes

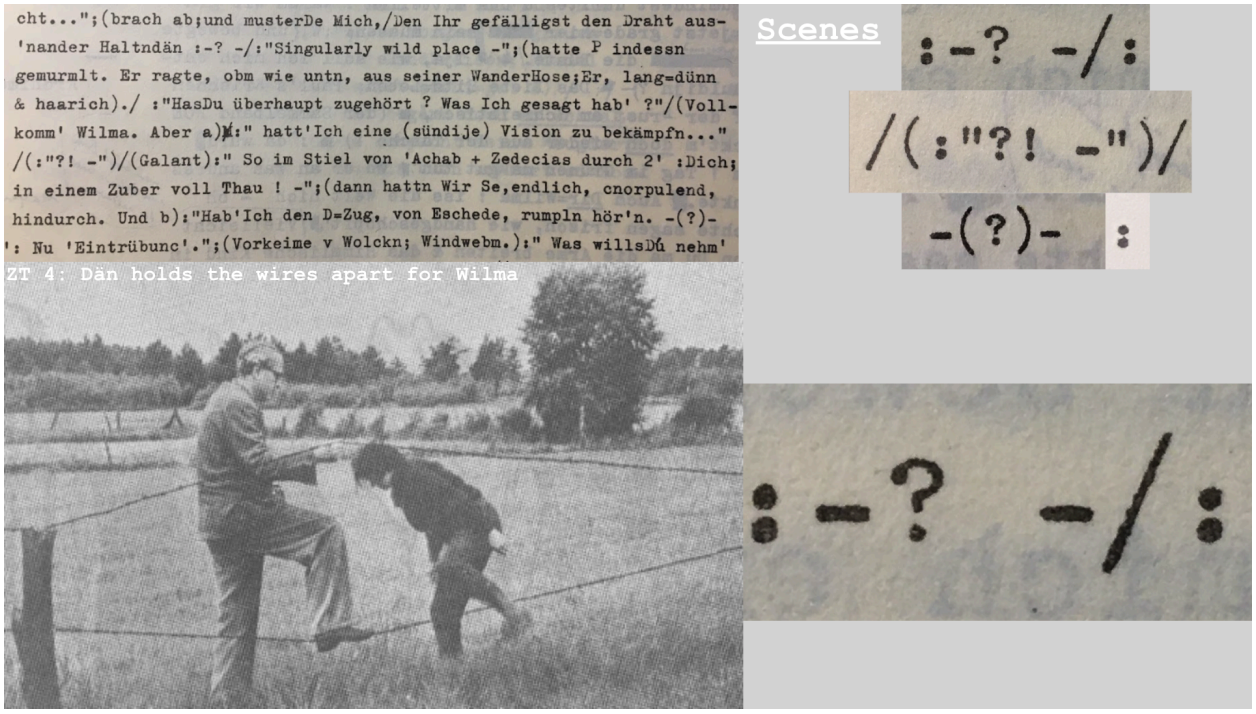
cht...";(brach ab;und musterDe Mich,/Den Ihr gefälligst den Draht aus-
'nander Haltndän :-? -/:"Singularly wild place -";(hatte P indessn
gemurmlt. Er ragte, obm wie untn, aus seiner WanderHose;Er, lang=dünn
& haarich)./ :"HasDu überhaupt zugehört ? Was Ich gesagt hab' ?"/(Voll-
komm' Wilma. Aber a)
:" hatt'Ich eine (sündije) Vision zu bekämpfn..."
/(:"?! -")/(Galant):" So im Stiel von 'Achab + Zedecias durch 2' :Dich;
in einem Zuber voll Thau ! -";(dann hattn Wir Se,endlich, cnorpulend,
hindurch. Und b):"Hab'Ich den D=Zug, von Eschede, rumpln hör'n. -(?)-
': Nu 'Eintrübunc'.";(Vorkeime v Wolckn; Windwebm.):" Was willsDú nehm'
ZT 4: Dän holds the wires apart for Wilma
Scenes
:-? -/:
/(:"?! -")/
-(?)-
:
:-? -/:

Fig. 1. (Full resolution images and other links can be found at https://tinyurl.com/ZThyperlinks)

Schmidt sets the scene at the start of the story: a third of the way down the first page, bands of Xs form lines of barbed wire. In the center the lines widen out, like they would if someone were holding them apart for another person to pass through. As the narrative begins, the reader is immediately confronted with punctuation strings (Fig. 1). Several lines into the story Wilma says something about the previous night before interrupting herself to take stock of Dän who is holding the wires apart for her. Next comes a punctuation string (top right detail), followed by Paul uttering "Singularly wild place” in English. The punctuation string can be said

to function in up to five ways at once. (1) By default, because of its position in the text, it represents duration. This is the moment Wilma sizes Dän up before passing through the wires, which is the same moment Paul consecrates the Schauerfeld as worthy of a Poe tale with a phrase that alludes to several of the master's stories. (2) It is likely, given the sequence of events, which must at least include a momentary pause, that the punctuation also represents the gesture of two faces looking at each other. (3) Because readers are already alerted to the use of the typewriter to draw pictures, the dashes here will also have the association of wires in the fence. In this case, the question mark's curl calls to mind a body bending to pass between the wires (as in the photo). The slant of the virgule may then show the body straightening out after crossing the threshold. (4) The curl and slope could also be Paul's mouth in the act of thinking and muttering. (5) Finally, this bit of punctuation could represent the inner life of Dän, toggling between Wilma looking him over and Paul invoking the unhallowed ambience of Poe's fictional world.

Moments later Wilma accuses Dän of not listening to her anecdote about the previous night. He pleads guilty with two excuses: first, he had a sinful vision to do battle with, and second, there was a train rumbling by in the distance. After mention of the sinful vision, a questioning-exclamatory unit of punctuation appears offset by a colon and bookended by parentheses and virgules. Again, the punctuation has multiple valences. The quoted punctuation (second from the top right in the illustration) could be at least three things. (1) Dän's sinful vision, when Wilma was sizing him up, of her in a tub full of dew. (2) Dän's recollection of his sinful vision a moment ago and his cognitive processing of it. (3) Some other gesture or facial expression. Ultimately, precise meanings remain obscure.

The next punctuation unit, however, introduces the reader to one of the most stable, systematic, and standardized of all of Schmidt's punctuation strings, that of omitted dialog, which is characterized by a question mark in parentheses (third of the details in the illustration). Variations of this string are often preceded by an ellipses and followed by a dash (Fig. 2). In these cases the punctuation string normally stands for an easily specifiable question that the reader must supply. Here, the question is, "What will the weather be like today?" Other attempts to articulate omitted dialog are provided in the linked slide deck (https://tinyurl.com/ZThyperlinks). In this example from the first page we can also see how bits of punctuation strewn between sentences can convey a rich ambiguity of scenic elements, which both pauses and propels the action as the reader stops to scrutinize.

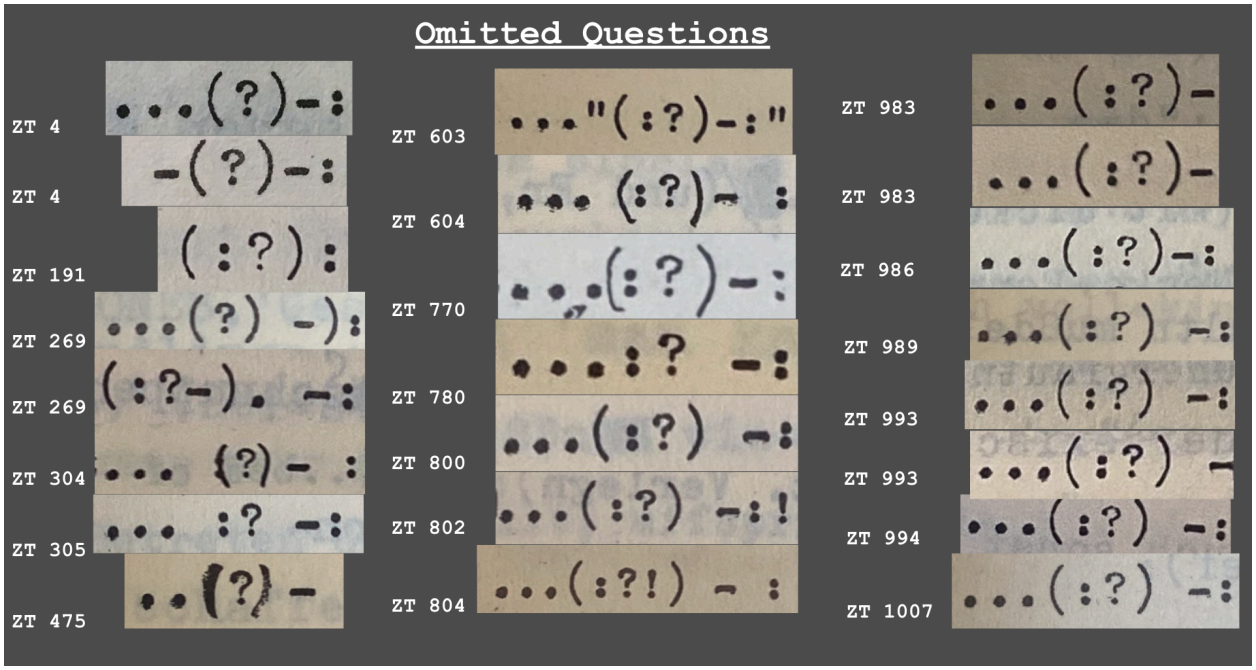

Fig. 2

2. Gestures and Objects

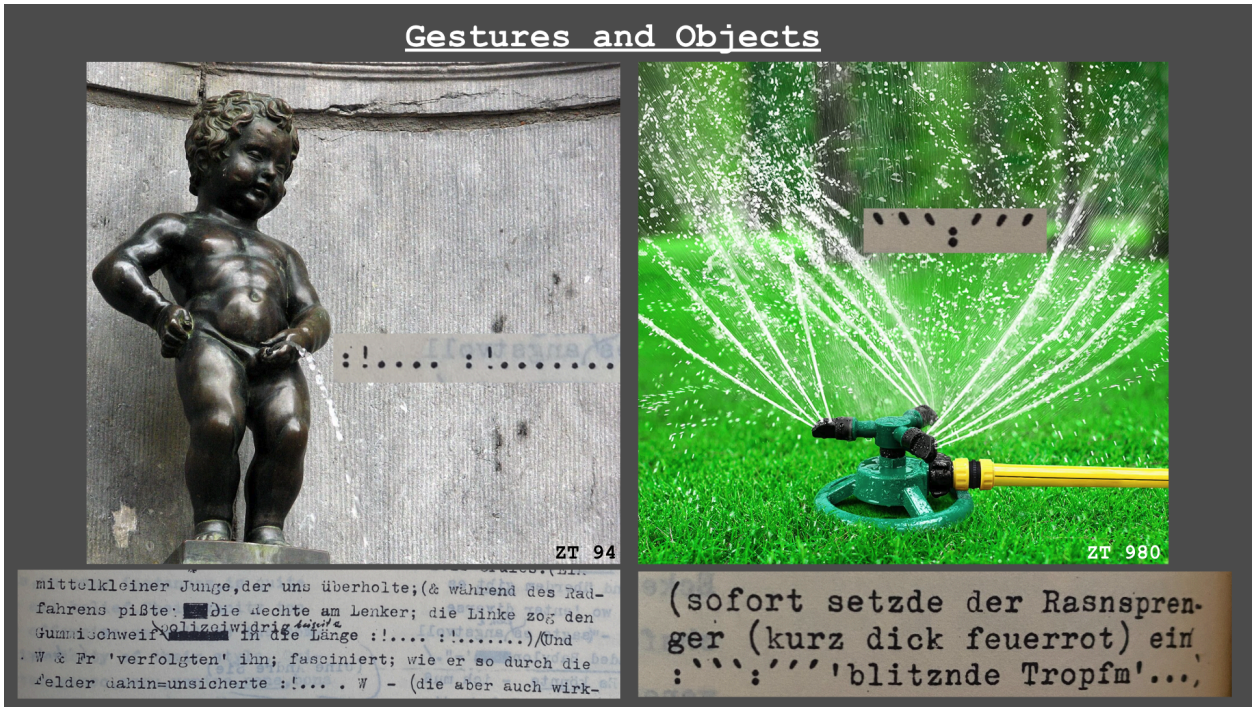

Fig. 3

Partway into the morning walk, Dän and the Jacobis are overtaken by a medium short lad on his bicycle who is urinating as he rides past (Fig. 3, left). Wilma and Franziska follow him

with their eyes. The full stops resemble the fluid dynamics of a falling stream of liquid breaking up into smaller drops. The dots are distributed in the scene — first four, then seven, then three — which represent urination visually, musically, and spatially. The visual analogy is clear: dots flow from an exclamation mark like drops from a penis. Rhythm is suggested by evenly repeating dots while the fuller scene takes on a musical quality from its motivic development. One member of our group, Arthur Kolat, has experimented with making sound recordings of typographic elements in *ZT,* substituting individual instruments for particular punctuation marks. This type of experimental reading makes the rhythms of the text concrete and shows how punctuation might interact with a reading in real time. A recording of this passage (available at https://tinyurl.com/ZThyperlinks) emphasizes the interruption of the flow of urine, where one might imagine a jostle from the bicycle causing the body to clench momentarily. The scene closes with an echo that gives the passage's distribution of elements a spatial dimension as the cyclist passes the viewers and then recedes into the distance (bottom line of the text in the illustration). Some nine hundred pages later, in a marginal note, punctuation visually depicts another display of water: a lawn sprinkler spraying rotating jets. This short string of punctuation with accents around a colon is also rhythmic, conjuring the triplet clicking of the sprinkler as it rotates back and forth.

Another example of a smaller punctuation unit iconically representing an object is the tent from the Dancing Witch scene in Book VII (987/1075, Fig. 4). In this case, the punctuation has a tempo marking (langsam) rather than a specific rhythm. The pause is anticipatory and theatrical.

Fig. 4

These examples only hint at the enormous variety of ways Schmidt used punctuation to depict gestures, objects, and scenes. The reader of *ZT* constantly sees and tries to parse the punctuation of people walking, tiptoeing, sauntering past, striding off, striding toward, running upstairs, looking around, leafing through books, writing, drawing, laughing, singing, kissing, masturbating, orgasming, decapitating woodticks (758/802), and much else besides. Schmidt's dash-dominated punctuation strings alone describe a diverse range of gestures. At the beginning of Book II, for example, three dashes separated by two commas depict Wilma swiveling in different directions in a gesture of panoramic viewing (149/150, Fig. 5, left side, second from top). Within the span of a few pages in the middle of Book V, Schmidt uses a chain of dashes to variously indicate pushing "the glassy coffin lid over its long box" (714/748, Fig. 5, right side, second from top); wiping up drops of rain steam from the window seat with a piece of toilet paper (715/750, Fig. 5, right side, third from top); and Franziska's "presenting one tonguelet after the other" in a gesture of licking stamps (717/752, Fig. 5, right side, fourth from top). At the beginning of Book VI, a string of dashes shows Paul "fanning the silence, with his ball=point" (790/841, Fig. 5, right side, fifth from top). Later on dashes become Franziska's hand setting forth "on quite lusty adventures" (831/889, Fig. 5, right side, third from bottom). This list goes on and on, and illustrates a category of punctuation that utilizes strings of dashes, represents gestures, and often refers to the real world in a visual way.

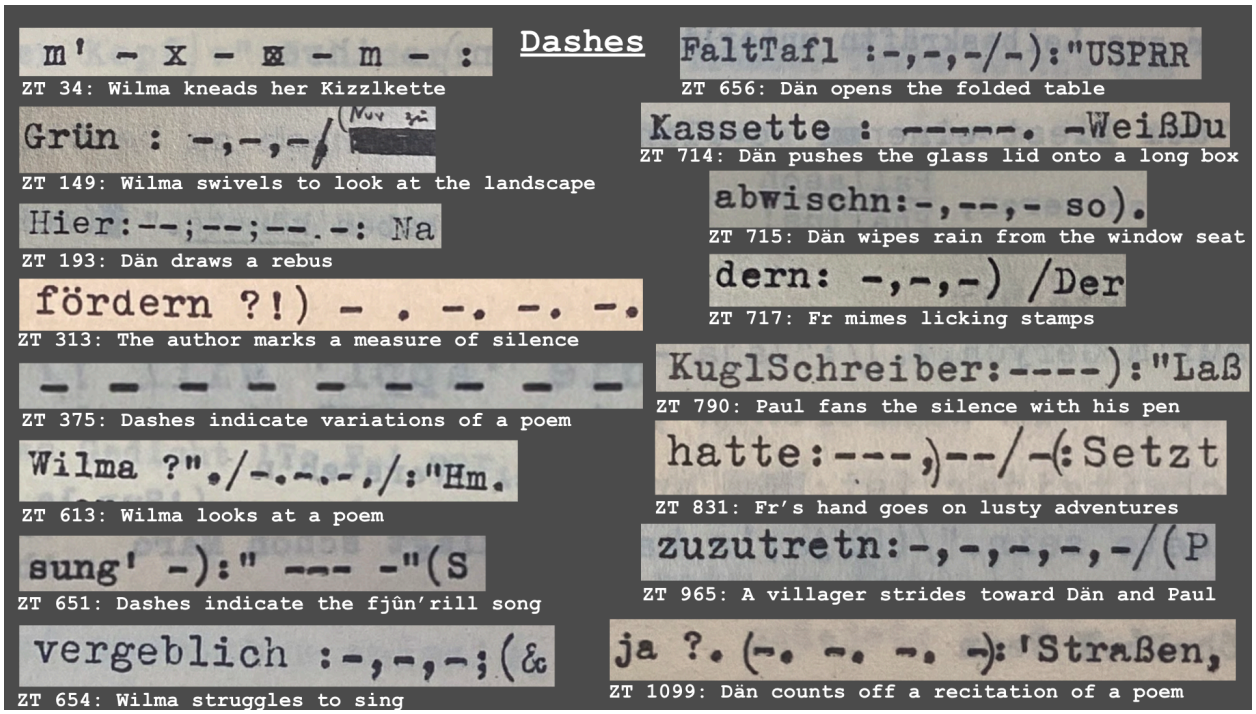
Dashes
m' - x - ⊠ - m - :
ZT 34: Wilma kneads her Kizzlkette
Grün : -,-,-/
ZT 149: Wilma swivels to look at the landscape
Hier:--;--;--.-: Na
ZT 193: Dän draws a rebus
fördern ?!) - . -. -. -.
ZT 313: The author marks a measure of silence
- - - - - - - - - -
ZT 375: Dashes indicate variations of a poem
Wilma ?"./-.-.-./:"Hm.
ZT 613: Wilma looks at a poem
sung' -):" --- -"(S
ZT 651: Dashes indicate the fjün'rill song
vergeblich :-,-,-;(&
ZT 654: Wilma struggles to sing
FaltTafl :-,-,-/-):"USPRR
ZT 656: Dän opens the folded table
Kassette : -----. -WeißDu
ZT 714: Dän pushes the glass lid onto a long box
abwischn:-,--,- so).
ZT 715: Dän wipes rain from the window seat
dern: -,-,-) /Der
ZT 717: Fr mimes licking stamps
KuglSchreiber:----):"Laß
ZT 790: Paul fans the silence with his pen
hatte:---,)--/-(:Setzt
ZT 831: Fr's hand goes on lusty adventures
zuzutretn:-,-,-,-,-/(P
ZT 965: A villager strides toward Dän and Paul
ja ?.(-. -. -. -):'Straßen,
ZT 1099: Dän counts off a recitation of a poem

Fig. 5

3. Writing and Drawing

Like the dream of a card catalog pointing to a vast library, the dream of the notecards (Zettel) is one of writers and writing. *ZT* is therefore a vast and densely thicketed dreamland populated by the writers and writings in Schmidt's idiosyncratic canon. The four main characters are constantly handling books, finding passages, reading, discussing, and pondering writing. They also write themselves: Dän is a great writer of fiction, poet, translator, literary critic, theorist, essayist, and biographer. Paul and Wilma are his translator disciples. In the course of their literary lives and scholarly investigations they write and draw in various ways. They also look at drawn images in the pages of the books in Schmidt's library and reproduce drawings from these books as they wander the fields of Lower Saxony. Like the punctuation itself, the images — often inserted diagrams and reproductions — blur the distinction between writing to be read and drawing to be seen.

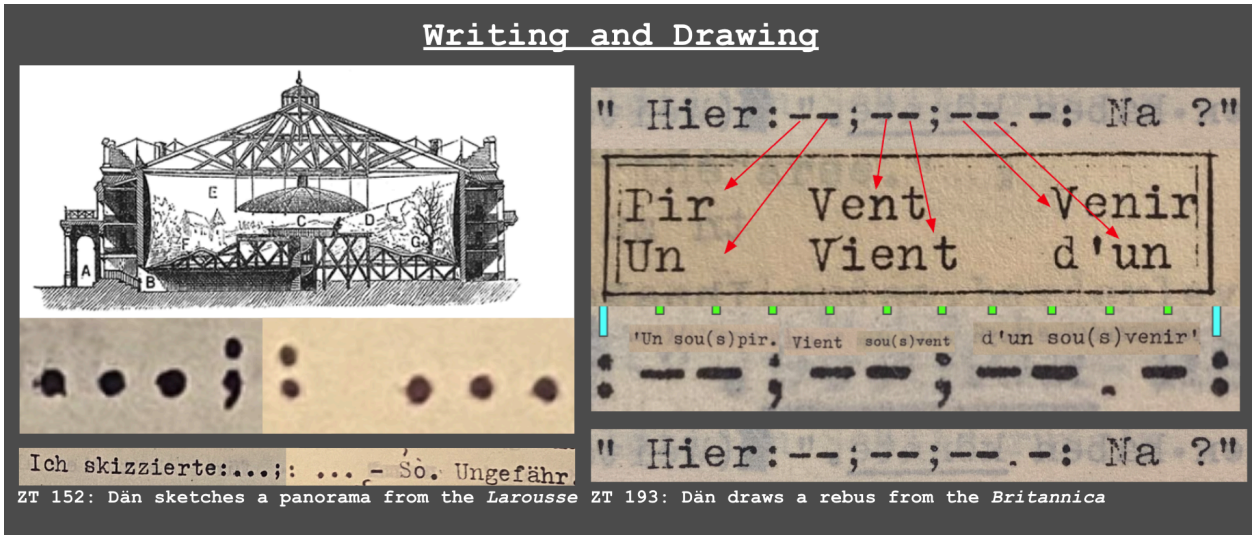
Writing and Drawing
" Hier:--;--;--.-: Na ?"
Pir Vent Venir
Un Vient d'un
'Un sou(s)pir. Vient sou(s)vent d'un sou(s)venir'
Ich skizzierte:...;: ... - So. Ungefähr
" Hier:--;--;--.-: Na ?"
ZT 152: Dän sketches a panorama from the *Larousse* ZT 193: Dän draws a rebus from the *Britannica*

Fig. 6

In Book II punctuation depicts sketching. First, a punctuation string echoes the contour of a cross section of a panorama from the *Nouveau Larousse Illustré* (1898) that Dän has drawn on a notepad (Fig. 6). Later in the chapter, a string of colons and dashes shows Dän drawing a rebus from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911) in the sand. This rebus is a word puzzle that is solved by determining the word that makes a coherent sentence when inserted between the given pairs and read from bottom to top. In this punctuation string there is a double meaning because in addition to showing Dän drawing, it also represents the rhythm of the syllables in the completed phrase. The ten punctuation marks between the two framing colons are the ten syllables of the line broken into groups of three, three, and four, as if Dän has the lilt of the lyric in mind while drawing the undeciphered rebus.

4. Poetry and Music

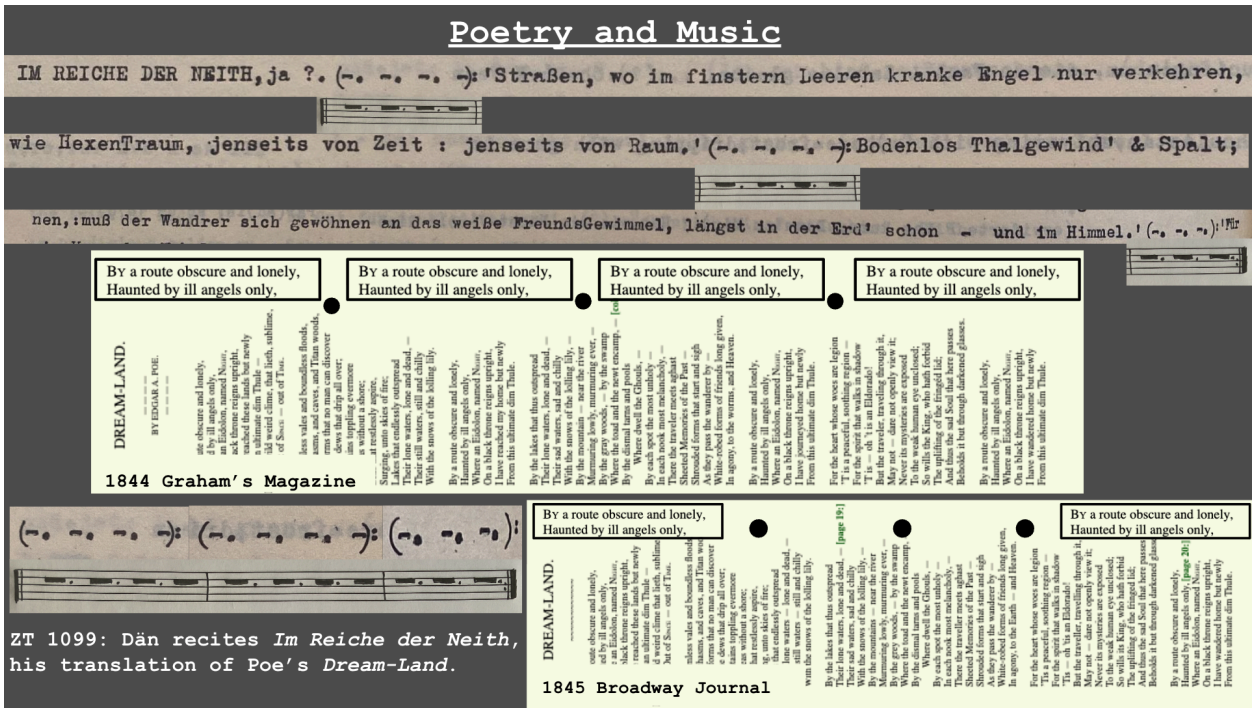
Poetry and Music
IM REICHE DER NEITH, ja ?. (-. -. -. -): 'Straßen, wo im finstern Leeren kranke Engel nur verkehren,
wie HexenTraum, jenseits von Zeit : jenseits von Raum,' (-. -. -. -): Bodenlos Thalgewind' & Spalt;
nen, : muß der Wandrer sich gewöhnen an das weiße FreundsGewimmel, längst in der Erd' schon - und im Himmel.' (-. -. -.):
BY a route obscure and lonely,
Haunted by ill angels only,
DREAM-LAND.
1844 Graham's Magazine
1845 Broadway Journal
ZT 1099: Dän recites Im Reiche der Neith, his translation of Poe's Dream-Land.

Fig. 7

The main premise of *ZT* is that there ought to be a new and more enlightened German translation of Poe's complete works. Paul and Wilma have come to the cottage on the heath to gain the knowledge they need for this project from Dän, the hermetic Poe guru. They spend the entire novel going over everything Poe wrote and mining it for encrypted biographical content that they can decode and incorporate into the translations. By way of example, Dän offers to gift the Jacobis spectacular new translations of four poems — The Dreamland Group — which appear, elaborately laid out, at various points in *ZT*. In Book VII, Dän recites "Im Reiche der Neith," his translation of Poe's "Dream-land." A dash-dot motif appears in parentheses at three points throughout the poem (Fig. 7, top). It refers visually to music notation, and, in turn, rhythmically to the tempo and pauses that will produce the greatest possible eloquence of expression. At the same time, the dashes and dots refer to the differently structured versions of the poem that Poe published in his lifetime. By extension, this also refers to the translator's job of determining the authoritative text to translate or arranging an original version for translation.

An audio recording of Schmidt reciting this translation provides insight into how the author performs his written punctuation (https://tinyurl.com/ZThyperlinks). It further supports the reading of these punctuation strings as markers of the poet-singer's internal rhythm. Reading along as Schmidt recites, one can see that the first string marks a silent count off; the second, a measure of rest between the first two stanzas; and the third, a rest between two later

verses. A single dash in parentheses followed by a colon acts as a breath mark before the final refrain. These are punctuation strings that resemble music visually — dotted whole rests within parenthetical bar lines — and therefore act like musical notation for the performer to read.

In addition to functioning as a tempo-setting device, the dashes and dots also refer to the different configurations of the poem that Poe published, starting with the 1844 version for *Graham's Magazine*, which alternates four choruses of "By a route obscure and lonely..." with the poem's three verses. The string of four dashes separated by three dots mirrors this poetic structure exactly. In subsequent versions, like the 1845 publication in *Broadway Journal*, Poe shortened the poem so that the "By a route..." refrain occurs only twice, once at the beginning and end of the poem. In *Broadway Journal,* the three stanzas of verses run consecutively between the two chorus-bookends. The fact that the punctuation unit loses a dash in its third iteration alludes to the variation in number of choruses in successive publications of the poem. However, it also imagines a version of the poem that Poe never wrote: one that alternates three choruses with three verses. This interpretation of the punctuation gains plausibility because the sections in *ZT* that present the "Dreamland Group" poems are preoccupied with the textual variations among the poem's extant versions. Indeed, several of Schmidt's virtuosic translations, like "Feenland" (522-523), are translations of versions of the poem, arranged by Schmidt, that Poe himself definitely never published and probably never wrote.

Another example of dashes referring to music and poetry comes when Dän quotes Poe's poem "Lenore," which mentions a funeral march (Fig. 8). In quotation marks after the quoted line of poetry are six typewriter keystrokes: space, dash, dash, dash, space, dash. This is a plausible reference to the second movement of Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony* (1805), whose funeral march utilizes that precise rhythm. In the typeset German version the first space is erased. In the English translation the four dashes are evenly spaced between the quotation marks thus altering its interpretive possibilities. Future typeset versions should consider preserving the spacing between individual marks of punctuation strings.

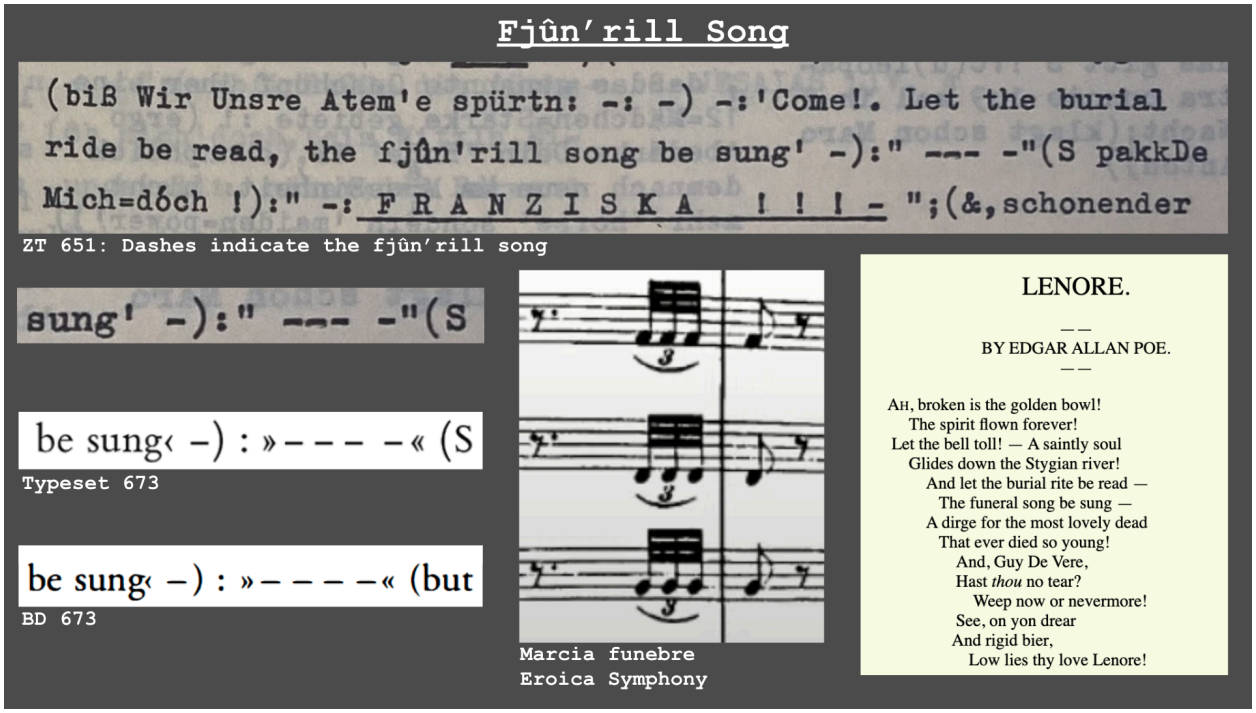
Fjûn'rill Song
(biß Wir Unsre Atem'e spürtn: -: -) -:'Come!. Let the burial
ride be read, the fjûn'rill song be sung' -):" --- -"(S pakkDe
Mich=dóch !):" -: F R A N Z I S K A ! ! ! - ";(&,schonender
ZT 651: Dashes indicate the fjûn'rill song
sung' -):" --- -"(S
be sung‹ –) : »– – – –« (S
Typeset 673
be sung‹ –) : »– – – –« (but
BD 673
Marcia funebre
Eroica Symphony
LENORE.
BY EDGAR ALLAN POE.
Ah, broken is the golden bowl!
The spirit flown forever!
Let the bell toll! — A saintly soul
Glides down the Stygian river!
And let the burial rite be read —
The funeral song be sung —
A dirge for the most lovely dead
That ever died so young!
And, Guy De Vere,
Hast thou no tear?
Weep now or nevermore!
See, on yon drear
And rigid bier,
Low lies thy love Lenore!

Fig. 8

Envoi: The Zettel

The 3,200 scanned Zettel—a fraction of the roughly 60,000 index cards Arno Schmidt used in writing *ZT*—provide only a partial record of the novel's typographic development. The current digital corpus contains very few of the elaborate punctuation strings discussed in this essay. The longest examples—such as those in Zettel 664 and Zettel 912 (Fig. 9, center)—do not appear in the published text. In cases where punctuation strings seem to have been planned in advance, they are often substantially altered in the final work. The most notable examples of wordless imagery are Zettel 3 and 5 (Fig. 9, left) which outline the first line of the book.

More commonly the Zettel contain short functional elements such as " –: ", ellipses, or single and double virgules marking section breaks (as outlined by Dieter Stündel).[12] These brief forms read as working notation and differ in scale and complexity from the extended punctuation strings studied in this essay.

[12] Dieter Stündel: *Arno Schmidt Zettel's Traum*, wie Anm. 3, hier S. 108–110.

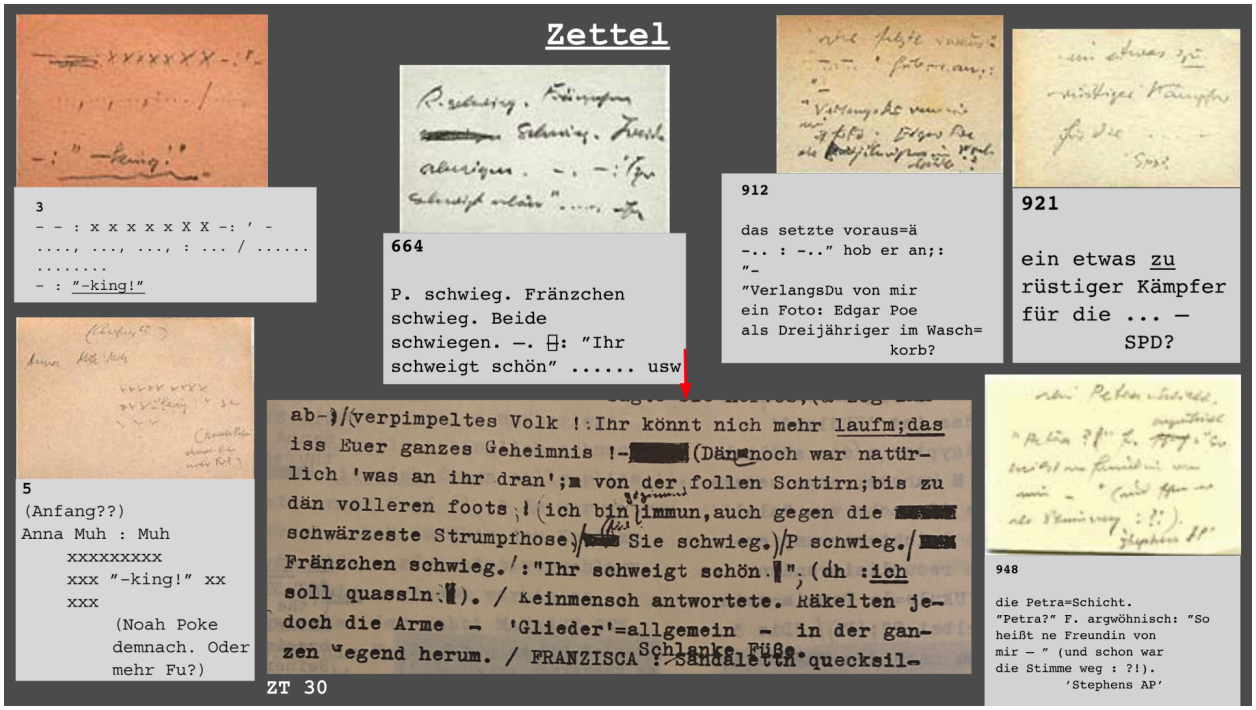

Fig. 9

The limited presence of fully developed strings in the Zettel indicates that many of the configurations in the printed text were not determined at the planning stage. The available evidence suggests that longer, more complex strings were often produced during composition, drawing on but not duplicating the fragmentary notation recorded in the preparatory materials. In this respect, the Zettel record a restricted set of typographic resources, while the novel demonstrates a wider range of combinations and expressive, contextually-driven transformations of those resources. Comprehensive digitization of the remaining Zettel would allow for a more complete assessment of the relationship between Schmidt's working notation and the typographic structures of the finished text, and of the extent to which the latter were improvised or premeditated.[13]

Database

Our reading group has been collecting passages in a Punctuation String Classification spreadsheet, available at https://tinyurl.com/ZThyperlinks. The spreadsheet is open for commentary, correction, and addition. All comments are welcome, and can be addressed to the corresponding author, Arthur Kolat, at arthurkolat@gmail.com.

[13] A complete and openly accessible corpus of the *Zettel* would offer multidimensional possibilities for research, from the reconstruction of Schmidt's reading and working methods to the study of his elaborate citational systems, marginal note practices, and other compositional procedures. Our group has been working on a list of reasons the Zettel might be of interest to future scholarship.

Conclusion

The punctuation strings in *ZT* are elements of a larger system of signification that is part of the novel and, like a foreign language, must be studied to be understood. They do not simply represent one mode of literary expression or depiction. They are not all either gestures or rhythms or drawings. Some can be decoded and certain forms can be provisionally outlined, however, they go well beyond what Schmidt himself represented in *Berechnungen I-III*. They are the narrative elements of a writing-dreamland where Paul can silently stroke the air with his ballpoint pen and it turns into written characters in the book we are reading, if not quite a fully decipherable language. By holding Schmidt's typoscript against a lit rush, this book of punctuation strings lets out the piquant fact that it is pierced by numerous stabs and gashes from the prongs of the author's typewriter. Schmidt took a few lines of satire about punctuation from *Finnegan's Wake* and used it seriously throughout his magnum opus, weaving lines of punctuation between sentences and into the fabric of his monstrous tapestry. His palette was restricted to the limited number of characters on his typewriter. He was improvising within the parameters of a modal scale, and managed to achieve an astonishing variety of poetic expression, like a poet endlessly versifying the moon. All this makes the punctuation in *ZT* an intriguing subject for further research.